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Men's Basketball Preview: Eagles Take on First-Place Little Rock Saturday

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Men's Basketball Preview: Eagles Take on First-Place Little Rock Saturday

The Eagles are 8-3 in Hanner this season.

Marc Gignac



Frank Fortune

Men's Basketball | 2/19/2016 4:21:00 PM

Story Links

Georgia Southern (12-13, 8-7) vs. Little Rock (23-3, 13-2)

Saturday, Feb. 20 - Hanner Fieldhouse (4,325) – 7 p.m.

[Live Video](#) | [Live Stats](#) | [Tickets](#) | [Season Promotions](#) | [Gameday Guide: Basketball](#)

Radio: 103.7 WBMZ-FM (Statesboro/Metter/Swainsboro), 102.1 WZAT-FM

(Savannah), 1370 WLOP-AM (Jesup)

Promotions: True Blue Week Stamp Card Promotion continues; Student section

surprise – Students need to #PackHanner for special giveaways and games; Cheerleader Senior Day - recognize cheer team seniors during halftime of the men's game

Series Record: GS leads 16-13, L1

Last meeting: 1/28/2016, L 80-67 (A)

Probable Starters:

#2 [Mike Hughes](#)

#3 [Ike Smith](#)

#4 [Tookie Brown](#)

#10 [Jake Allsmiller](#)

#14 [Coye Simmons](#)

Georgia Southern Information:

[\[Stats \(PDF\)\]](#) [\[Roster\]](#) [\[Schedule\]](#) [\[@GSAthletics MBB\]](#) [\[Game Notes \(PDF\)\]](#)

Little Rock Information:

[\[Stats\]](#) [\[Roster\]](#) [\[Schedule\]](#) [\[@LittleRockMBB\]](#)

Layup Line

- Georgia Southern welcomes Sun Belt leader Little Rock to Hanner Fieldhouse for a 7 p.m. tipoff.
- The Eagles are in the middle of a four-game homestand and a stretch in which Georgia Southern plays three games in six days.
- It's the second meeting of the season against the Trojans. Little Rock topped Georgia Southern 80-67 Jan. 28 in the Jack Stephens Center.
- Georgia Southern is in sole possession of fifth place in the Sun Belt standings, one game out of fourth and two games back of second. Little Rock is at the top of the table with a three-game lead on second place.
- Georgia Southern has a four-game lead on the last three teams in the league - Texas State, Troy and Appalachian State - for the final Sun Belt Championship spot. The top-8 teams make the Sun Belt Championship March 9-13 at Lakefront Arena in New Orleans.
- Without taking tiebreakers into consideration, the Eagles' magic number (combo of wins and/or opponent losses) to clinch a Sun Belt Tournament spot is three over Texas State and two over Troy and Appalachian State.
- Georgia Southern is 4-1 in its last five contests and coming off a 90-59 triumph over Arkansas State Thursday night. The Eagles have won eight of their last 12, including five at home.
- The Eagles are 28-11 under head coach [Mark Byington](#) in Hanner Fieldhouse and posted a 13-2 record in the building last season. The Eagles are 8-3 this season.
- Georgia Southern freshman [Tookie Brown](#) is ranked in the top-10 in the Sun Belt in scoring (4th, 18.1 ppg), assists (7th, 3.2 apg), steals (2nd, 1.8) and assist/turnover ratio (6th, 1.4). He ranks eighth among freshmen in NCAA Division I scoring.
- The last Sun Belt freshman to average over 18 points a game was Charlotte's Henry Williams in the 1989-90 season. For historical perspective, Georgia Southern coach [Mark Byington](#) was 14 years old in 1989, and assistant coach [Larry Dixon](#) played

against Williams during his college career.

- Brown has scored 20-plus points in nine games and reached double figures in 24 of 25 contests, including the last 23.
- Brown (18.1 ppg) is half of the third-highest scoring freshman duo in the country. He and [Ike Smith](#) (11.8 ppg) combine to average 29.9 points a game.
- Eagle sophomore [Mike Hughes](#) is one of four Sun Belt players ranked in the league's top-10 in scoring (10th, 14.3) and top-20 in rebounding (17th, 4.9).
- Little Rock has won eight out of its last nine and is coming off a 57-49 road victory at Georgia State Thursday night.
- The Trojans are 11-3 on the road and 6-2 in road league games.
- Little Rock ranks first in the country in scoring defense (58.3 ppg) and sixth in field goal percentage (.412). The Trojans lead the Sun Belt in both categories.
- Josh Hagins leads the team in scoring with 12.7 points a game to go along with 4.7 assists and four rebounds a contest, and Marcus Johnson Jr. averages 12.6 points.

Team Storylines

- The Eagles are led in scoring by freshman [Tookie Brown](#). The last time a freshman led Georgia Southern in scoring was the 1999-2000 season, when the school's all-time scoring leader, Julius Jenkins, led the Eagles with 15.5 points a game. Elton Nesbitt averaged 15.7 points a game to lead the Eagles in scoring as a newcomer to the program in 2003-04, but it was his sophomore season after spending a year at Compton Community College.
- Brown and fellow rookie [Ike Smith](#) average 30.1 points a game combined, making them the third-highest freshmen scoring duo in the country. Dwayne Bacon and Malik Beasley of Florida State (31.9 ppg) lead the nation, and Rice's Marcus Evans and Marquez Letcher-Ellis are second (30.3).
- Georgia Southern's seven freshmen and redshirt freshmen combine for 41.5 points a contest, the third-highest total in the country.
- Three Eagles are in the top-15 in the Sun Belt in 3-pointers made per game - [Mike Hughes](#) (9th, 2.0), [Jake Allsmiller](#) (4th, 2.2) and [Tookie Brown](#) (14th, 1.7).
- [Tookie Brown](#), [Ike Smith](#) and [Mike Hughes](#) all scored 20-plus points in the win over UT Arlington Feb. 4. The last time three Eagles scored 20-plus points in a game was Jan. 16, 2014, an 88-81 overtime over Furman in Hanner Fieldhouse. [Angel Matias](#) (21), [Jelani Hewitt](#) (21) and Tre Bussey (26) all scored 20-plus points.
- Georgia Southern's 11 blocked shots against UT Arlington Feb. 4 were one shy of the school record, set against Texas San Antonio in 1989.
- [Mark Byington](#) is coaching in his 102nd career game today and his 91st at Georgia Southern.
- Under [Mark Byington](#), Georgia Southern is 34-5 in games when leading at half and 43-1 when leading with five minutes to go.
- Since joining the Sun Belt in 2014, 18 Georgia Southern games against Sun Belt schools have been decided by five points or less, and the Eagles are 11-7.
- The Eagles are averaging 77.4 points a game this season and have scored 80-plus points in nine games and 100-plus in three contests. Georgia Southern scored 80-plus points in six contests last year.
- The Eagles have played every team in the league at least once and posted a 4-6

record through the first half of conference play.

- Eleven different Eagles have scored 10 or more points in a game this season.
- Georgia Southern is 20-5 in Hanner Fieldhouse in its last 25 contests there.
- Georgia Southern posted a 4-6 record in the non-conference portion of its schedule.
- With 11 of 12 scholarship student-athletes who are freshmen, redshirt freshmen or sophomores (92 percent), Georgia Southern has the highest percentage of underclassmen on its current roster of the 345 NCAA Division I squads. Liberty (91 percent), Ohio State (85 percent), Fairleigh Dickinson (85 percent) and Wyoming (80 percent) round out the top 5.
- [Devin Boykins](#) is the lone scholarship senior on the Eagles' roster, but this is his first year in the program.
- Georgia Southern lost 76 percent of its scoring and 72 percent of its rebounding from last season.
- The Eagles were picked 10th in the Preseason Sun Belt Conference Coaches Poll.
- Three student-athletes who redshirted last season - [Jonathan Sanks](#), [Aubrey McRae](#) and [Shawn O'Connell](#) - are making their debuts this season.
- Georgia Southern has used 10 different combinations of starting lineups this season.
- The Eagles lost their first Sun Belt game after leading at halftime at Georgia State Jan. 19 (15-1).
- The Eagles' 101-100 win over Appalachian State Jan. 25 was their first win when allowing 100 points since a 112-104 triumph over Old Dominion Jan. 7, 1978. It was just the third time Georgia Southern has won a game when conceding 100 points (135-109 vs. Piedmont, 2/24/1951 and 110-106 vs. Samford, 1/20/1975). It was the first time the Eagles put up 100 points against a Division I opponent since a 116-73 victory over UC Davis Nov. 12, 2006.
- Georgia Southern played its first ranked opponent since 2008 when the Eagles traveled to No. 7/6 Duke Dec. 15. Their last game against a ranked opponent was also at Duke Nov. 11, 2008.
- The Eagles played their Sun Belt opener on the road for the second straight season. Georgia Southern is 0-2 all-time in Sun Belt openers.
- The Eagles played six of their first eight games on the road, a stretch that included contests at Ole Miss, Auburn and No. 6 Duke.
- Georgia Southern's 21 steals against Bob Jones (11/30) was one shy of the school record set against Little Rock in 1981 and tied against The Citadel in 2004.
- After not playing an SEC opponent since a 78-75 loss to Auburn Dec. 30, 2011, the Eagles have faced two this season. Georgia Southern fell 82-72 at Ole Miss Nov. 16 and 92-62 at Auburn Nov. 20.
- Georgia Southern's 116 points in a 116-49 season-opening win over Webber International Nov. 13 were tied for the 16th most all-time and the most since a 116-73 neutral site win over UC Davis Nov. 12, 2006, which was the 2006-07 season opener.
- The Eagles' 40 3-point attempts tied for the second-most in school history (West Georgia, 1/2/1992).

The Series

- This will be the 30th meeting in the all-time series, which began in 1988.
- Georgia Southern leads it 16-13 and swept the Trojans last season. Those contests

were the first in the series since the 1990-91 season, when both schools were members of the TAAC.

- Little Rock took an 80-67 win in this season's first meeting, back on Jan. 28 at the Jack Stephens Center.
- Three of the last five meetings have been decided by five points or less.
- The Eagles are 9-4 against the Trojans at home and have won the last two.
- **Last Meeting - 1/28/2016 - Jack Stephens Center:** Marcus Johnson Jr. scored 24 points, and Little Rock canned 13 3-pointers as a team to down Georgia Southern 80-67.
- [Tookie Brown](#) netted 17 points and corralled six rebounds to lead Georgia Southern, while [Mike Hughes](#) tallied 16 points, seven rebounds and two assists. [Ike Smith](#) scored nine points, and [Shawn O'Connell](#) posted eight points and six rebounds.
- Johnson Jr. hit seven triples for the Trojans, and Roger Woods scored 15 points. Josh Hagins finished with 10 points, six rebounds and six assists, and Mareik Isom scored 10.
- Little Rock shot 51 percent from the field and 59 percent from 3-point range. Georgia Southern shot 44 percent from the field but made just 5 of 25 from behind the arc.
- Little Rock made nine of its first 13 shots, including four 3-pointers, to build a 27-14 advantage with 7:51 left in the first half. The margin grew to 16 points when Johnson Jr. hit a 3-pointer, was fouled and made the free throw. Brown answered with a conventional 3-point play, and Georgia Southern trailed 41-28 at halftime. Turnovers plagued the Eagles as they committed eight in the period, and Little Rock turned them into eight points.
- Georgia Southern knocked down five of its first eight shots in the second half, and an O'Connell fast-break layup cut the margin to 46-40 early in the frame. The Trojans pushed the lead back into double digits as the Eagles went cold from the field, missing 10 straight at one point, and a Johnson Jr. triple made the score 67-52 midway through the period.
- **Last time in Hanner - 1/31/2015:** [Jelani Hewitt](#) led Georgia Southern's balanced scoring attack with 17 points, and the Eagles nailed 12 3-pointers to earn a 76-61 win over Little Rock.
- Hewitt added six assists for the Eagles, and [Angel Matias](#) chipped in 14 points and five rebounds. [Curtis Diamond](#) came off the bench to tally 13 points and two assists.
- Josh Hagins led Little Rock with 15 points and seven rebounds, and Mareik Isom scored 10.
- Georgia Southern canned 12-of-28 from long distance after hitting 12-of-23 Thursday night against Appalachian State. The Eagles shot 48 percent from the floor while holding the Trojans to 36 percent and 10-of-40 in the second half.
- Leading 37-32, the Eagles scored 10 straight points to take control of the contest early in the second frame. Hewitt hit a 3-pointer during the stretch, and Diamond capped it with five straight points, making the score 47-32 with 14:10 left in the game.
- The cushion, which never dipped below double digits the rest of the contest, ballooned to 19 points when Hewitt fed Diamond for a 3-pointer from the right wing with 8:13 to play. The largest lead was 23 points after a [Coye Simmons](#) baseline jumper with 1:31 to go.

Next Up

- Georgia Southern plays host to Georgia State Tuesday at 6 p.m. in Hanner Fieldhouse.
- It's a Whiteout, and the game will be broadcast live on ESPN2.
- Promotions: Sign Making Station will be set up for fans to get creative and show their True Blue spirit on the national broadcast; Fans will be able to enjoy multiple music groups at the game, including DJ Nino, the University Singers, Statesboro High School Drumline and as always, the loud and proud Hoop Troop; Free white out t-shirts will be handed out to students (while supplies last) as well as any fan who brings a Flight game program from the Eagles' softball home opener earlier that day at 4 p.m.

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